

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Program great for procrastinators

I'm a real sucker for products that promise to make my life easier.

In fact, my office is chock full of them — most of them unused.

Well, someone at Information Research Corp. of Charlottesville, Va. must have known I was a soft touch, so they sent me a copy of their latest program to review for this column.

Opening the box, I was mesmerized by the product's clever name and fancy packaging. Grabbed by "ActionTracker" and the subtitle, "Action Management Software," I was hooked. What more could any overworked, action-oriented, macho manager want?

For example:

✓ "The ActionTracker concept works the way you do! Let's say

you're assigned a project by your boss, client or club president. That's a source. Next, you'll want to fully describe the project and the actions needed. If your project involves repetitive sets of actions, call up Action Templates you've already created. If you like, you may

assign various actions to people, equipment, vendors or other resources at your command. That's it! ActionTracker does the rest." I began to get confused. What did it say it does? I kept reading.

✓ "ActionTracker's reporting is where you get real action. Other reports help you keep the workload balanced. ActionTracker will amaze you with its user-selected sorting, filtering, formatting and output options. ActionTracker puts the data in

your hands the way you want to see it." Wow, it sure sounds exciting. But maybe I missed something. What does it actually do?

✓ "What makes ActionTracker so powerful is its flexible, unstructured data-entry requirements coupled with outstanding reporting capabilities. Written in Compiled Pascal, C and Assembly languages, ActionTracker is fast! The program uses direct screen I/O for fast screen display and refresh." Well, it's nice to know that whatever it does, it does it quickly.

✓ Ah, finally — the answer: "ActionTracker includes comprehensive budgeting and reminder capabilities. Each action can be assigned to a specific or as yet undefined resource with corresponding budget and reminder data. You'll have up-to-the-minute comparisons of budgeted vs. actual vs. forecast amounts. All this adds up to making ActionTracker fast, flexible, powerful and complete." Whew.

But I still didn't know how to get started.

Frustrated, I threw down the manual and loaded the program on my computer, determined to try it for myself. Soon, alas, the truth was apparent: it actually did nothing at all. And to make matters worse, it was complicated, tedious and frustrating to operate.

But don't take my comments, made under stress as I threw the manual and disks in the trash, to mean that ActionTracker has absolutely no value. If you want to put off doing your work by spending hours of time defining and organizing it first on your computer, ActionTracker is the ultimate procrastination device.

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